

Director's Report to the Fish and Wildlife Commission

December 7-8, 2007

“A Sound Stewardship of Fish and Wildlife”

We serve Washington's citizens by protecting, restoring and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats, while providing sustainable fish and wildlife-related recreational and commercial opportunities.

Fish and Wildlife Goal:

Achieve healthy, diverse and sustainable fish and wildlife populations and their supporting habitats

Birch Bay Characterization Project: The collaborating agencies (WDFW, Ecology, WSDOT, Whatcom County, and others) successfully completed the characterization of hydrologic processes, fish and wildlife habitat, potential wetland restoration sites, and an analysis of development build-out for the Birch Bay watershed. The results and associated conservation recommendations were well received by the Whatcom County Council. The Council went on to urge county planning staff to have the multi-agency collaboration in assisting the citizens group planning for stormwater management within the watershed fine-tune those recommendations.

Family Forest Fish Passage Program (FFFPP) Program: The Family Forest Fish Passage Team had a half-day meeting with the program's five contract engineers and WDFW Engineers to examine projects done this year. The engineers shared design concepts, special challenges, and lessons learned. This year, 25 FFFPP projects were completed, of which 20 were completed by our contracted engineers and 5 by outside engineers. We had problem projects, including one collapsed culvert, two that had work done not authorized by an HPA, one not built to specifications, and three with allegations that they were over-designed. None of the problem projects were designed by FFFPP contract engineers. To reduce future problems, FFFPP is assigning contracted engineers to work on projects managed by less experienced sponsors. Average project costs have quadrupled since 2004 because of cost increases in gas and steel, projects going to bid late in the construction season, and complexity of projects this last round. To reduce cost increases, we are funding projects earlier in the year so that design work may be done and they can go to bid before the construction season. In 2008, the program is planning to correct 51 barriers on family forestlands.

Baker River Hydro Project: Puget Sound Energy has selected the team of Mort McMillen/Natt McDougal to finish the design and construct the new fish hatchery to meet the requirements of Article 101 of the settlement agreement. The schedule has milestone design dates of 30% design on December 3, 2007, 60% design on February 1, 2008, and 90% design on April 4, 2008. Construction of the new hatchery is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2008, and will be phased over a two-year period so that fish culture at the existing hatchery can be transferred to the new hatchery without affecting production. The Terrestrial Resource Implementation Group (TRIG) has expanded its search for elk mitigation lands by investigating other areas outside of the "Initial Purchase" area because negotiations with those landowners have stalled. Puget Sound Energy also negotiated a settlement agreement with Diking Districts 1 and 12 and the cities of Burlington and Mt. Vernon. These entities

will drop their legal challenge to the city of Concrete's construction permitting process and the Department of Ecology's 401 Certification. The newly reached settlement agreement should guarantee that the entities' legal challenge would not delay the license issuance by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Hanford Cleanup and Fish & Wildlife Restoration: DOE has announced they will cooperatively conduct a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) for injuries to fish and wildlife associated with years of contamination at the Hanford Facility. WDFW staff, in collaboration with other agencies and tribes, are establishing a multi-agency advisory council and developing guidance, strategies, and processes for managing, overseeing, and implementing what is considered the largest NRDA in the United States. Additionally, WDFW staff continues to provide technical assistance on the development and assessment of the River Corridor Baseline Risk Assessment and the Columbia River Corridor Baseline Risk Assessment, which will provide risk information to help guide cleanup decisions.

Experimental License Process for Ocean Energy: The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has developed a Pilot License process to allow in-water testing of new technologies for harvesting hydrokinetic energy (energy from waves, tides, and currents). To facilitate deployment of pilot projects into our waters, FERC prescribes that all state resource issues and permitting requirements be resolved within a six-month period. WDFW staff, in collaboration with Ecology, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Office of Regulatory Assistance, provided comments to FERC on important considerations and precautions for implementing the pilot license process in Washington State waters.

Packwood Lake Hydroelectric Project: Energy Northwest (ENW) intends to file an application for a new FERC hydroelectric license under the Integrated Licensing Process (ILP). The Packwood Project will be one of the first projects to file under the new ILP, and is the first in Washington State. WDFW is working with agencies and Tribes to collaboratively comment on over twenty study reports and to develop fish and wildlife protection, mitigation and enhancement measures for inclusion into ENW's license proposal that is due to FERC in February 2008.

Invenergy Wind North America: Staff has prepared and sent comments to Kittitas County regarding the proposed Invenergy Wind North America wind farm located between the Old Vantage Highway and I-90 east of Ellensburg. The project proposal will be located on both private and Washington Department of Natural Resources lands. We are concerned that the project proposal lies between the Colockum and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas and the Yakima Training Center, comprising some of the largest remaining blocks of viable shrub-steppe habitat in the state. We are concerned that the wind farm will affect recovery of sage grouse by adversely affecting migration, increasing mortality, and impairing ecological connectivity between these large contiguous blocks of shrub-steppe.

Army Corps of Engineers, McNary Lakeshore Management Plan: The Walla Walla District Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) continues its consultation with WDFW and NMFS in the update of its McNary Lakeshore Management Plan, last updated in 1983. The primary focus for WDFW is the requirements for USACE re-permitting of private docks and shoreline vegetation management along the Columbia and Lower Snake rivers. Dock/shoreline checks were recently performed by the three agencies to assess interim compliance and performance of newer dock designs. Although many deficiencies were still identified in the newer docks and scores of non-compliant, unpermitted dock structures

remain, good progress toward the establishment of ESA-compliant dock planning, designing, and construction is apparent. Vegetation management practices along the Columbia River are improving at a slower pace. This is especially troublesome in light of rapid growth in the Tri-Cities and the rapid appreciation in real estate value of shoreline lots. Increased enforcement by the USACE, with possible assistance from state and local agencies, is needed to help stem the clearing of shoreline riparian vegetation to provide views and residential beach development. Although the shore is owned and managed by the USACE as a public resource, waterfront homeowners continue to modify adjacent riparian areas for their personal purposes.

Two Legislative Reports in Progress for Aquatic Nuisance Species Unit: The WDFW Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Unit is busy with completion of two reports to the 2008 legislature due December 1.

The first is the Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention and Enforcement Program for Recreational and Commercial Watercraft. This biennial report is provided to meet the requirements of Chapter 77.12.879 and 43.43.400 (Washington State Patrol) RCW and describes the coordination and implementation since it was funded in 2005. Recreational and commercial watercraft are considered the greatest pathway threat for the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species such as milfoil and zebra/quagga mussels. Zebra/quagga mussels are considered the highest risk due to their ability to cause catastrophic environmental, economic, and social problems. The report will summarize AIS management and risk context, accomplishments and recommendations. All recommendations will foreshadow potential 2009 legislative proposals that will address issues such as rapid response plans and AIS enforcement capacity.

The second report is the Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Committee biennial report. The ANS Committee was established under Chapter 77.60.130 RCW. Membership is made up of most state agencies, the Washington Sea Grant Program, tribes, federal agencies, conservation and environmental groups, and representatives of affected industries such as shellfish and recreational boating. The report will cover current status, committee and member accomplishments, and recommendations for the 2008 and 2009 legislature. Recommendations include supporting the Washington Invasive Species Council's 2008 supplemental funding request; supporting the Puget Sound Partnership maintaining a role in ANS issues; anticipating a 2009 request for a dedicated ANS education outreach specialist FTE; anticipating a 2009 request to adopt the Columbia River Basin Team rapid response plan for zebra/quagga mussels; anticipating a 2009 request for additional funding for more ANS issues; and anticipating a request to clarify and enhance ANS policy and laws to reflect existing structures under Ecology, Agriculture, and the Noxious Weed Control Board.

Declining Populations of Marine Fish in Puget Sound: On November 15, the Fish Program hosted a meeting to develop a multi-agency team to address the problem of declining populations of marine fish in Puget Sound. Participants were NOAA-Fisheries, the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, recreational fishing groups and WDFW. Initial focus will be on lingcod because of the high interest of recreational fishers in this species, its role as an apex predator and characteristics of lingcod life history that will facilitate evaluation of rebuilding efforts. An important part of the planned activities will be the hatching of lingcod eggs at the NOAA-fisheries lab at Manchester. As part of a research project, the young lingcod will be raised at the hatchery, tagged and released into Puget Sound. Movements and growth of the tagged lingcod will be monitored over the next few

years. The juvenile lingcod will be monitored to determine habitat preferences, early life history and growth and movement. Additionally, we will examine ecosystem effects of lingcod, such as predation on other species.

An operational plan to conduct this work will be developed by representatives of the various agencies, tribes and recreational fishing groups. We plan to have the plan finalized by the end of 2007. Major funding gaps were identified and need to be addressed early in 2008.

Creosote Piling Removal: Staff attended a DNR meeting on their Puget Sound creosote-treated wood removal project. The DNR developed a restoration program in 2002 and partnered with many groups to inventory and remove creosote-treated wood debris from Puget Sound beaches. While launching clean-up efforts through the Puget Sound Initiative, Governor Gregoire identified creosote removal as a high priority. This multi-year project has been granted a \$4.8 million dollar biennial budget by the legislature in 2007 to remove creosote-treated wood from beaches and nearshore habitats. The increase in funding allowed DNR to extend their work to removing pilings, which are much of the source of creosote-treated debris on beaches. This presentation focused on new and on-going removal projects in Jefferson and Clallam Counties, including pilings in front of the Point Whitney Shellfish Lab. The science of creosote was discussed, as well as the selection process for prioritizing removal sites and the actual removal process. Priorities include concentration of pilings, future restoration potential, critical habitat, herring spawn and/or crab and shellfish, navigational hazards, failing structures, local priorities, and availability of matching funds. Considerations when selecting sites for removal include contamination of the sediment, roosting & nesting birds, other wildlife (bats, seals), popular dive sites, and historical status of structures and the possibility of redevelopment of the sites. Over the past three years the program has removed more than 1,300 pilings, over 1,700 tons of pilings/derelict debris and 19,000 square feet of overwater structure from Puget Sound shorelines.

Public Goal:

Ensure sustainable fish and wildlife opportunities for social and economic benefit

Troutlodge Negotiations: Region 2 Staff have been working with Fish Program in Olympia to develop a proposal for a new lease agreement between WDFW and Troutlodge. Troutlodge is requesting an extension of their current lease at the Soap Lake facility and Department staff is requesting an increase in the number of trout provided by Troutlodge for the lease payment.

Wenatchee River: Steelhead angling on the Wenatchee River began on October 22nd. We estimate that from October 22 - 31, 664 anglers fished 2,586 hours on the Wenatchee River and caught 231 steelhead, of those 114 adipose fin clipped fish were kept, 117 adipose fin present steelhead were released.

During November 1 - 15 angling effort declined when compared to Octobers results. An average of 15 anglers have been on the entire river during the week, and 20 –30 anglers during the weekend. The river flows have increased, water clarity is good and water temperatures are well within good water temperatures for steelhead fishing.

Belfair/Little Mission Clam Kill: Staff and Skokomish Tribe shellfish biologists reviewed clam survey data from Little Mission, a DNR-owned public beach immediately west of Belfair State Park in Hood Canal. The clam survey performed in May 2007, showed a 94%

decrease in legal-sized littleneck clam biomass compared to the previous survey in 2004. Almost all clams observed during the survey were dead, and were buried one foot deep in sediment (ordinarily littleneck clams live in the top 1-2 inches). Shellfish biologists concur that the most likely cause of the sedimentation was the removal of a dike at Belfair State Park in summer 2006 as part of a salmon restoration project. The dike removal by Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group (HCSEG) and State Parks probably allowed fine sediments to be carried west toward Little Mission during rainfall events in the fall and winter of 2006-07. Little Mission, although accessible only by boat, had been in recent years an important source of clam “trades” with the Skokomish Tribe. Most of the state’s clam share was traded to the Tribe in exchange for larger clam shares at Potlatch State Park, West Dewatto, and Rendsland Creek. Now that the clam population at Little Mission has been virtually wiped out, the potential for clam “trades” (and therefore extended recreational seasons at Potlatch, Dewatto and Rendsland) is unlikely. Staff will perform clam surveys in cooperation with the Skokomish Tribe to determine sedimentation impacts on the clam population at Belfair State Park in spring 2008.

Clam Population Analysis: Staff completed estimates of clam population surveys on 24 public beaches in Region 6. Clam abundance is roughly the same or slightly greater than last year on the majority of the surveyed beaches. The most significant increases in clam abundance tended to occur on beaches that we have been enhancing with hatchery-reared Manila clam seed. At Wolfe Property and Shine State Parks, for example, Manila clam biomass increased 49% and 57% compared to last year. At West Dewatto and Point Whitney Tidelands, clam biomass increased 146% and 63% compared to last year, again as the result of Manila clam enhancement. At Dosewallips State Park, Manila clam density increased 58% this year. Although we recently enhanced this beach with Manila “seed,” most of this year’s increase is the result of improved natural recruitment. Two beaches suffered significant decreases in Manila and native littleneck abundance in 2007: Eagle Creek and Rendsland Creek. Both of these public beaches are subject to winter flooding, and recent floods have been particularly severe. Flooding typically washes away some clams while smothering others with sediment. A significant decline in both Manila and native littleneck biomass also occurred at South Indian Island County Park. Annual estimates of clam biomass on public beaches are used to calculate fishing quotas for the following year, and to help recommend recreational seasons.

L.T. Murray Wildlife Area Addition: The Department has completed the purchase of a 77.8-acre property located 19 miles east of Snoqualmie Pass near Lake Easton. This is an important property in the continuing effort to protect a north-south wildlife migration corridor through the Snoqualmie National Forest. This corridor is necessary to maintain ecological connectivity and prevent an isolation of mammal populations along the Cascade Range. Private development in this area threatens that corridor. Control of this property is also important to WDFW’s elk management plans as it will allow herd management and harvest opportunities. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service funded this purchase under a Section 6 Habitat Land Acquisition grant.

Trespass Issues: An increase in trespass cases throughout Region One has emerged. Officers are routinely getting calls to mediate. In many of these cases, an injured animal shot on the property that the hunter has permission to hunt, ends up on property that the landowner will not allow the hunter to retrieve the animal.

Sherwood Forest Release Site: Officers worked with Grapeview Elementary and agency staff to resolve concerns over the location of the newly established Sherwood Forest Pheasant Release Site located in Mason County. Previously, the school's principal called the Enforcement Program after observing hunters stray from the release site and hunt very near the school playground. Signs were posted to mark the hunting boundary and the site nearest the school will be open only during weekends and holidays.

Funding Goal

Ensure effective use of current and future financial resources in order to meet the needs of Washington State's fish and wildlife resource for the benefit of the public

Wild Horse Coordinated Resource Management (CRM): The Whiskey Dick Wildlife Area (WLA) and the new Parke Creek acquisition were visited by CRM members to plan improvements on spring sites. The construction shop will work with existing spring boxes wherever possible and minimize disturbance around the springs. Improvements will be funded with the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Dave Wallace Grant, and legislature-provided funding. .

Competence Goal:

Implement processes that produce sound and professional decisions, cultivate public involvement and build public confidence and agency credibility

2008 License Year: Preparation has been well underway for the 2008 License Year. Last year, licenses were made available at dealerships on December 7. Licensing has been successful in working with its vendor, Outdoor Central, and 2008 licenses were available to the public on December 1, 2007.

Coho Management in the Tilton River and Upper Cowlitz Basin: The WDFW Director and selected staff recently met with local constituents to discuss the Coho Supplementation Program that is being implemented in the upper Cowlitz River. The meeting included OFM staff and a field representative for Congressman Baird. WDFW staff continues to evaluate the number of hatchery fish being transported upstream based on returns of naturally produced coho and number of fish harvested in ongoing selective fisheries. Based on these improving returns of naturally produced coho and the intense local fishery, WDFW staff is increasing the number of hatchery fish being transported to the upper Cowlitz River near Packwood by about three-fold.

We are managing hatchery-origin and natural-origin coho salmon releases in the Tilton River, Lake Scanewa and the Upper Cowlitz Rivers – with the objectives of maximizing sport fishing catches of hatchery fish, while attaining 1:1 hatchery to natural-origin ratio on the spawning grounds. We increased the daily bag limit in all these Upper Cowlitz Basin fisheries to six adult hatchery coho. WDFW is concurrently monitoring the actual harvest rates at the upper Cowlitz River near Packwood, the Cispus River, and Lake Scanewa. We have employed a full-time Scientific Technician to conduct a creel survey in the Upper Cowlitz for the next month or two – depending on how long the run and fishery lasts. Thus we can coordinate our releases relative to empirical harvest rates and coho run size projections that are updated on a weekly basis.

Sportfishing Rules Meeting: As part of the major cycle for changes to our sportfishing rules, staff members of the Inland Fish, Steelhead and Cutthroat, Marine and Anadromous, Shrimp, Crab, and Enforcement Advisory Groups to go over public testimony received during the comment period and give input to staff as they work to develop final recommendations on each of the proposals. After several levels of internal review, the recommendations will be presented to the Fish and Wildlife Commission for action at their meeting in February 2008.

Saltwater State Park Reef Removal: Tom Sparks of Department of Parks and Recreation has contacted the WDFW in regards to removal and reconstruction of a reef at Saltwater State Park. The area has been very popular with divers over the past years but the underwater structures have deteriorated, leaving little to attract underwater marine life or non-consumptive viewing activity.

We are entering into an agreement with Parks to help remove and reconstruct an underwater site that will attract a marine community and provide viewing opportunities for the dive community. Parks is also interested in making this a non-consumptive activity such as a MPA or Conservation Area in conjunction with this activity. Parks, working with the dive community, will request consideration in rule making to implement a no harvest rule structure at this site for the future. They will also need a trespass type of closure during the construction phase, which we can companion with a take closure as a public safety action.

2008 Youth Expo: Preliminary planning for the 2008 Youth Expo has started. The Expo is slated for May 16 and 17, 2008, at the Benton/Franklin County Fairgrounds in Tri-Cities, Washington. The Go Play Outside Alliance of Washington, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will sponsor this exciting event.

Land Access Program: The Toutle, Coweeman and Margaret Game Management Units (GMU) were open during the special elk permit and general elk modern firearm season at Weyerhaeuser's Mt. St. Helens Tree Farm. Up to 12 volunteers a day participated in the Land Access Program and were instrumental in implementing additional motorized access during the weekdays. Many hunters that were encountered on the farm have provided positive feedback to this program and are appreciative of this additional motorized access.

Science Goal:

Promote development and responsible use of sound and objective science to inform decision-making

Interim Marine Nearshore Guidance Document Produced: A new guidance document, "Protecting Nearshore Habitat and Functions in Puget Sound: An Interim Guide," has been produced and is available online at http://wdfw.wa.gov/hab/nearshore_guidelines/. The document, written for a local planning audience, provides a synthesis of current science on several important nearshore habitats and processes, and directions for where to find data and specific recommendations for moving through the mitigation sequence. A consultant group, the Aquatic Habitat Guidelines Working Group, a multi-agency committee, with participation from our Habitat Program, Ecology, DNR, DOT, the Recreation and Conservation Office, the Puget Sound Partnership, and the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development produced the document. It has been widely distributed through the Internet to shoreline planners and decision-makers in the Puget Sound region. Feedback is being collected via online survey.

Engineered Log Jams Installed on Sammish and Stillaguamish Rivers: Engineered log jams (ELJs) for fish habitat enhancement have been successfully permitted and installed on a tributary to the Sammish River in Skagit County and on the North Fork Stillaguamish River in Snohomish County. Both of these projects are intended to divert high flows into extensive side channels that will provide flood relief and habitat for rearing and spawning. The ELJs will also develop scour pools and cover in the rivers where adult salmon can hold for more favorable conditions and smolts can hide from predators. These ELJS will be monitored over the next few years to assure integrity and functionality.

Spokane Region 1 Office – Phase II: Discussions have been held with Region 1 staff members to identify specific needs for the addition of a lab/warehouse. Capital and Facilities Management will begin accepting offers for a design consultant under this phase of the project.

Western Gray Squirrel Project: The Wildlife Program is currently radio-tracking 31 western gray squirrels and 7 eastern gray squirrels on the Fort Lewis study area. Of the 9 western gray squirrels translocated from the Methow to Fort Lewis earlier in October, there are 6 that are alive and appear to be doing well. Three animals died within 4 days of the release; one was depredated and 2 others died of unknown causes and will be shipped to Washington State University (WSU) for examination.